# IX

## SOUTH ARABIA *

Until very recent years South Arabia has been so isolated, not only from the West, but from the more familiar territories of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, that even the Arabs of those lands knew little more of Yemen and Ḥaḍramaut than these names, and frequently had only the vaguest ideas as to their positions on the map. Just because of this relative isolation South Arabian society has remained virtually unchanged in its structure and interaction from the pre-Islamic or early Islamic period, and it still bears an extraordinarily close resemblance to the society into which the Prophet Muḥammad was born. Yemenis of course played an important part in the formulation of early Islam, and the Ḥaḍramīs have been instrumental in no small degree for shaping and spreading Islam in East Africa and the Far East. So it would follow that an understanding of South Arabian society, prior of course to recent political changes which have begun to affect it, is relevant indeed to the study of early Islamic history and the development of Islamic society.

In attempting to describe the social structure as I understand it, it is essential to commence with a sketch of each class, for Arabian society is as stratified and inegalitarian as that of most European countries, and the transition from one class to another vastly more difficult.

It is common knowledge that Arabians are organised in tribes, but it is not generally realised that all but a few South Arabian tribes are settled people, living in villages, and not nomads. Yet for instance in Ḥaḍramaut, the tribes are known as *Bedu*—and I suspect that when Ibn Khaldūn speaks of Bedouins in North Africa, applying the word to tribal society settled there, he is using the word in exactly the same way. The Arabian tribes of the south are perhaps more numerous than the northerners and their traditional material culture is in certain respects of a higher standard. The tribes may be regarded as a sort of

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* This is the English original of a lecture in French delivered at the Sorbonne in 1967, with subsequent revisions and additions. The French version was published in *Arabica*, 1967 (xiv, iv, 284-97) under the title of "Société et gouvernement en Arabie du sud".

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arms-bearing aristocracy, but, even among themselves, there is not equality for there are often degrees of social distinction between one tribe and another. The test of social standing in the tribal and religious aristocracies lies in those tribes whom one considers honourable enough to marry one's daughter. This principle is enshrined in the Islamic law of *kafāʾah*, but the inference that it was established customary law long before Islam seems to me inescapable. [1] No person of a class inferior to the tribes would of course be considered a fit suitor by a tribesman for his daughter. Some tribes in antiquity were so exclusive that, according to the tenth century writer al-Hamdānī, their line became extinct.

The tribesman regards himself as the possessor of the quality called *sharaf* or honour, but the most important constituent of this honour seems to be the tradition of bearing arms and being capable of defending oneself and one's dependants. Consideration for his *sharaf* also imposes upon the tribesman an elaborate code of conventions and actions and this in itself renders him in some ways vulnerable even to those who do not possess *sharaf*. Those without *sharaf* are termed

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[1] This view is supported by Ibn Ḥabīb, *K. al-Muḥabbar*, (Ḥaidarābād, 1942), 310 in a chapter entitled "Usages which the pre-Islamic era (al-Jāhilīyah) had prescribed (*sanna*), and some of which Islam preserved and some of which it annulled." It runs "The equal (*kafīʾ*) used to ask the hand in marriage of the equal (i.e. not, of course, asking the girl herself, but her father, brother, paternal uncle or paternal cousins), and if one of the two (sides) were somewhat greater (*ashaff*) than the other in standing (*ḥasab*), he (the lesser party) would offer him an attractive dowry (*arghab lahu ʾl-mahr*). If he was a person of mixed parentage (*hajīn*, i.e. usually, a man with an Arab father and slave mother) he would ask a *hajīn* (for his daughter) in marriage, and he would marry him to a *hajīnah* girl like him." There follow the stereotyped phrases used at the time of asking for a girl's hand, such as, "We are your equals (*akfāʾ*) and likes (*nuẓarāʾ*)."

A case in point in the first decades of Islam is when the first Umaiyad Caliph Muᶜāwiyah wrote to the Umaiyad Governor of Medina, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, requiring him to ask ᶜAbdullāh b. Jaᶜfar for the hand of his daughter, Umm Kulthūm, in marriage to his (Muᶜāwiyah's) son Yazīd (later destined to become Caliph). Muᶜāwiyah sought thereby to bring back harmony (*ulfah*), resolve differences, and make united cause (*ijtimāᶜ al-daᶜwah*), by marrying his son to a girl of the Hāshimite house which was opposed to the house of Umaiyah. The authorities say that he was prepared to offer an attractive dowry (*ṣadāq*)- which, *ipso facto*, implies that (according to the passage cited from Ibn al-Ḥabīb) he considered his Umaiyad house somewhat lesser than the Hāshimites, though one may be permitted to consider the reporting to be not unbiased here. The rejection of his suit by the girl's maternal uncle al-Ḥusain however is, unequivocally, an insult by a leading Hāshimite to the leading Umaiyad, as implying that he did not consider the son of the Caliph of Islam to be of equal social standing with a Hāshimite girl. The incident is also related in *The Ansāb al-Ashrāf* of al-Balādhurī, vol. IV A, edit. by M. Schloessinger and M. J. Kister, Jerusalem, 1971, p. 121 f.

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*nāqiṣ*, that is "deficient," though there are many words used to express this idea. A tribesman's *sharaf* is "broken" as they say, by *ᶜaib*—the word cannot be adequately translated, but perhaps "disgrace" is the nearest approximation. A tribesman can commit an *ᶜaib* by acting in a way demeaning to himself—for example by killing a woman or a person of inferior status to his own. Or, on the contrary, he can have an *ᶜaib* inflicted upon him, as, for instance when another tribesman kills or merely molests a man or woman under his protection, or steals his property, or crosses his territory without his permission. The tribesman's face is thus blackened, and to whiten it, the *ᶜaib* has to be washed away by the spilling of blood or by reparation in money in order to repair his damaged honour.

The *shaikh*s, or *sulṭān*s, or headmen of these tribes are elected by the tribal group from families in whom the office is hereditary. In fact one might add that, in all classes, political or religious office is hereditary in a certain family, but it is also elective in the sense that the office-bearer is chosen from that family by election. But the tribal shaikhs are imbued with such pride that they find it impossible to accept the overlordship of any one of their fellow shaikhs. Co-operation between the shaikhs is therefore difficult for any length of time except when other classes intervene as we shall see they do.

Even the paramount shaikh of such a large confederation as Ḥāshid of the northern Yemen does not seem to have more than a limited authority, at most, over the shaikhs of the tribes composing the confederation. The Bin Aḥmar Mashāyikh of Ḥāshid are described as *Mashāyikh muhajjarīn min Ḥāshid wa-Bakīl*, a term difficult to translate accurately, but it implies that the tribes of these confederations protect and respect the Bin Aḥmar, in accordance with the institution peculiarly Yemenite, known as *hijrah* which will be discussed below. The Āl Aḥmar came originally from Ḥabūr in the north-western mountains (which I visited in 1966). They have leadership (*zaᶜāmah*) in war and in counsel, they are free of all *wājibāt* or obligations such as taxes like the *zakāt*, and they in fact tax the tribes. Shaikh ᶜAbdullāh b. Aḥmar told me that the Bin Aḥmar are Mashāyikh al-Shaml—which means the Mashāyikh of uniting or gathering together, equivalent to the ancient Arabic term *mujammiᶜ*. The ancestor of Quraish, the tribe of the Prophet Muḥammad was a *mujammiᶜ*. There is, I am informed, no Shaikh al-Shaml over Bakīl, though during the Egyptian occupation of the Yemen, the celebrated Khawlānī Shaikh Nājī b. ᶜAlī al-Ghādir (later treacherously murdered with many of his followers by the South

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Yemenis in Baiḥān) was accounted the paramount shaikh of Bakīl, if perhaps only in the sense of being a war-time leader of the confederation. On the other hand the Abū Rās family of Barat claim to be head of the Bakīl group of tribes and deny claims by al-Ghādir. It is maintained however that Bin Aḥmar has a *dāᶜī mujāb ᶜind Bakīl*, i.e. his summons to war would be responded to by Bakīl, and that Bakīl have only separate tribal shaikhs. The Bin Aḥmar would say to Bakīl that they were *dāᶜīn lakum bi-ḥaqq al-hijrah tuḥāribū maᶜā-nā*, summoning you by the right/duty of *hijrah* (protection etc.) to fight alongside us. During the war years of 1962-67, tribal allegiances by no means followed a clear pattern, but it may be said that most of the Ḥāshid confederation followed Bin Aḥmar in his opposition to the Imām, and most of Bakīl supported the Imām, but this does not imply a confrontation between the two confederations. The tribes of both groups however at the time of my tour in northern Yemen in 1966 were strongly opposed to the Egyptian occupation of the country.

The Mashāyikh al-Shaml—and incidentally I have recorded that there are two such shaikhly houses in the Jīzān province of Saᶜūdī Arabia—are of higher standing than what is known as the Shaikh al-Ḍamān. This latter title or appellation I have not heard anywhere else than in the northern Yemen, but of course that does not mean it will not be found in other parts of Arabia, and the functions of the Shaikh al-Ḍamān, one might say, are more or less those of tribal shaikhs anywhere. When I discussed this at Mabyan, north of the Yemeni centre of Ḥajjah, it was said that the *Shaikh al-Ḍamān yadfaᶜ mā fāt*, the Shaikh al-Ḍamān pays for what has perished, i.e. blood-money, damages of all sorts, etc. He then goes to the shaikh of the guilty man, in the case of a murder, and recovers the blood-money, or damages if it be some different type of offence, from the shaikh of the murderer's group. Here it was stated to be the Shaikh al-Mashāyikh who is the final arbiter in all cases, but I assume this is the same as the Shaikh al-Shaml. At Mabyan the Shaikhs were stated to administer their areas independently of the (Imāmic) government in matters of justice (*al-shaikh yunṣif min nafs-ah*); they would collect the *zakāt* (the tithe on crops), but they were given a certain proportion of the tax to enable them to entertain guests and carry out their other functions.

In Arabic generally the word *ḍamān* has from early times been employed in the sense of the farming of taxes or other sources of income. The Yemeni scholar al-Zabārah [2] cites the Umaiyad Caliph

[2] Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Zabārah, *al-Anbāʾ*, Cairo, 1376 H., p. 32.

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Yazīd b. Muᶜāwiyah as the innovator of *ḍamān* and limited land-tax (*kharāj muḥaddad*), and as having made a Ḥimyarī governor of the Yemen in return for a *ḍamān ᶜalā māl maᶜlūm*, a guarantee of a known (sum of) money, and some slaves, to be paid annually to him. This was abolished by the Caliph ᶜUmar b. ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz, along with customs duties (*mukūs*), and only the tithe (*ᶜushr*) and half-tithe taken by way of taxation. Whether this was a true innovation or merely the recognition of an ancient practice (which is much more likely) need not concern us here, but these rather stark historical notices at least hint at the possibility of the existence of the Shaikh al-Ḍamān functioning then as he does now.

The classes subject to tribal domination are several but the ratio of subject population to tribesmen varies considerably from one district to another. First in order of social standing come the merchant and artisan groups. In Ḥaḍramaut these are known as *miskīn*, a term derived from the sense of sedentary people not indigent persons—it is a curious thing to find this word used in the same application in Kurdistan. The wealthy merchant naturally commands a degree of respect everywhere, but in general the crafts are despised by tribespeople and in the Islamic Ḥadīth or Tradition there is plenty of evidence to show that this sentiment existed in early Islamic times. In the Yemen a group of professions of inferior status has been described by Ettore Rossi; [3] this includes the butcher, and one reason why the former President Ṣallāl was unacceptable to the tribes was because his father was alleged to have belonged to this profession or to have been a charcoal seller, though others maintain his father was a *shaikh al-lail*, or head of night-watchmen in one of the Quarters of Ṣanᶜāᵓ. To this group also belongs the *muzaiyin*, literally the barber, and to Rossi's description I would add my own similar but somewhat fuller information. In the village the *muzaiyin*, sometimes called or described as *khaddām al-qaryah*, servitor of the village, is in charge of the drumming at the feasts (*ᶜīd*), during the nights of Ramaḍān, at marriages and on other occasions—this is alongside his basic profession which is shaving (*ḥilāqah*), circumcision and blood-letting. He superintends marriage festivals and accompanies the bride when she is escorted from her father's house to that of her husband, be it in the village itself or in another village. He acts as a herald to summon people to assemble if there is occasion to do so, and he goes out to

[3] Ettore Rossi, *L'Arabo parlato a Ṣanᶜāᵓ*, Roma, 1939, p. 142-3.

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meet government officials such as crop assessors (*muthammirū/kharrāṣūn*), the inspectors (*kushshāf*) who review the assessment of the crop, tax-collectors and soldiers. He sees to their being served and looks after their lodging. When Tony Dorman and I visited Barat in 1973 we were housed by the *muzaiyin* at Sūq ᶜAnān in this way. The *muzaiyin* is the go-between when two villages or tribes dispute, and he has the right to go to and fro between the contestants without being harmed, for he is under the protection of all the tribes and to assault him would bring the greatest shame (*ᶜār*) upon the attacker. This very low social class is known as *mihtār* and *ᶜinḍīl* (f. *ᶜinḍīlah*, pl. *ᶜanāḍīl*) in Dhamār and Yarīm.[4] Yet it was evident in Barat that the *muzaiyin* was in other ways respected, and local feeling now seemed to wish to forget his lowly social status.

From the afore-going it is evident that the *muzaiyin* in the Yemen exercises the same function as the *dallāl* or broker in Ḥaḍramaut (discussed below), but in Ṣanᶜāᵓ the functions of the *muṣliḥ*, as described by the *Qānūn Ṣanᶜāᵓ*[5] are closer to those of the Ḥaḍramī *dallāl* in business matters, while in the Yemeni capital the *dallāl* exercises quite a restricted function.

Sometimes the term *muzaiyin* seems to apply to other professions within the group, for I was told that one of the Dhahabī shaikhs being by chance in Ṣanᶜāᵓ, saw, and later married the comely daughter of the proprietor of a *miqhāyah*, an inn or coffee-shop. As a result of this he was removed from his position as one of the Mashāyikh of his tribe because, as my informant said, "*saqaṭat haibat-uh li-anna-h zawwaj muzaiyinah*, his respect/honour had dropped since he had married a *muzaiyinah*."

To this low social category also belongs the *dawshān*, loosely described by Rossi as *specie di zingari*. *Dawshāns* of any individual tribe are only permitted to move about within the tribal area—e.g. the *Dawāshīn* of the Banī Maṭar may only circulate in Banī Maṭar territory. They make proclamations for the Shaikh of the tribe—in the case of a tribal dispute (*khilāf*) for example, they would announce that a meeting (to discuss the issue) will take place on a certain day (*yuᶜlin al-waᶜd/al-maḥḍar ba-yikūn al-yawm al-filānī*). They eulogize persons of note on social occasions, not in verse, but probably rhymed prose (*sajᶜ*). They act also at weddings and funerals—if a distinguished

[4] Ismāᶜīl b. ᶜAlī al-Akwaᶜ, *al-Amthāl al-Yamāniyah*, Cairo, 1968, p. 264, 310.

[5] Edit. H. al-Sayāghī, *Majallat al-Makhṭūṭāt al-ᶜArabīyah*, Cairo, May, 1964, x, i, p. 273, 307.

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guest is present they would praise his ancestors (*ajdād*), as being *dhū bās, shadīd*, mighty, powerful. Of course, at a funeral (*janāzah*), a Saiyid or a Qāḍī would come to read Prophetic Traditions (*ḥadīth Nabawī*), not the *dawshān*.

According to Muḥ. ᶜAlī al-Shahārī, [6] while all the crafts of the towns and villages are despised by the tribes, the peasants, and by the officials (*muwaẓẓafūn*)—the latter living in towns, the craftsmen themselves are divided into two social layers, the metal-workers in silver and brass, the dagger (*janābī*) makers, the carpenters and weavers (*nassāj*). On a lower level are the butchers, tanners, barbers and blood-letters. The two groups did not intermarry, but married only within the group, and, to take a case in point, a butcher could not marry the daughter of a tailor (*khaiyāṭ*). His statement in respect of silver-smiths is open to question, for I have heard of no other Yemeni silver-smiths than the Jews who would not come into either of these two social categories, unless, indeed, they converted to Islam. [7] Since the coup d'état of 1962 there is said to have been some relaxation of these restrictions on the marriage of a girl outside her social grouping, probably when the suitor is rich.

In Ḥaḍramawt where social demarcation is perhaps the most elaborate and pristine in form, there is below the *miskīn* class another known as *ḍaᶜīf*, described to me as workers in clay, that is to say, builders, potters, and field workers. The *ḍaᶜīf* is a weak man, not in a physical sense but simply in that he does not bear arms—a sturdy blacksmith could be a *ḍaᶜīf*, and he is the opposite of a strong (*qawī*) tribesman, or a person of noble birth called *sharīf*. The Arabic word *ḍaᶜīf* was used with this meaning from the earliest times—I have by now collected an amplitude of classical, mediaeval, and relatively modern references which clearly indicate that this is so—there is even one passage in the Qurᵓān itself in which I would claim *ḍaᶜīf* has this sense, and the *ḍaᶜafah* of the Muslims are mentioned as present at the battle of Badr in 624 A.D.

Fishermen and sailors on Arab dhows also belong to the subject classes, though in some places nowadays tribes-folk do engage in fishing.

In the Tihāmah plains of the Yemen and in some districts in the Aden Protectorate we find a black population of African origin which

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[6] *Ṭarīq al-thawrat al-Yamanīyah*, Cairo, 1966.

[7] Dr Paolo Costa however recently acquired a knife-handle in Ṣanᶜāᵓ with an inscription showing that it was made by a member of a Saiyid house.

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has clearly inhabited the country from very ancient times. It seems to belong to several different strata of immigration. I accept the traditional view that the Yemenite districts do contain the population considered in ancient times to be Abyssinian—whatever that may have meant—and that those people are the descendants of the Abyssinians of antiquity. But it seems to me that some of these non-Arab peoples are perhaps aboriginals and could have formed the pre-Arab population. One has to distinguish between, in order of social standing, the slave (*ʿabd*), the *khādim* (pl. *akhdām*), and the *laḥjī* (pl. *luḥūj*). At present I am still hardly at all informed about the *laḥjī* but it has been said to me that he is not particularly dark in colour. You cannot address, without insulting him, an *ʿabd* as, "*Yā khādim*," or a *khādim* as, "*Yā laḥjī*." Each of these marries only within his own social group.

In the matter of *kafāʾah*, the question of whom a man or a woman may marry, it is curious to learn that a tribesman would not marry a girl from the Bani ʾl-Khums—explained by one informant to me as the *muḥalwiq*, i.e. the barber who shaves you, the *qahwajī*, cafe-proprietor, the *jazzār*, butcher, though these are "white" and free. Nor would he marry the daughter of a *laḥjī*. On the other hand a tribesman may marry a slave-woman, but the tribes miscall the son of a slave-woman by a tribesman (*al-qabāʾil yiʿayyirūn ibn al-jāriyah*).

The *Akhdām* have been described by the Yemeni writer already mentioned, al-Shahārī [8], as distinguished from the Arabs by their dark colour. They are not allowed, he says, to possess land nor to work on the land as hired labourers for agricultural landowners. Rarely they are found acting as petty traders of a primitive sort. They are drummers at festivals in towns, but they move around as they have no fixed source of employment. They are not allowed to dwell in the towns and villages of the Arabs but are to be found in special isolated quarters. He concludes that though the *Akhdām* are free, slaves received better treatment than they do from the Arabs. This writer is said to have strong left wing sentiments, as is evident in his book, but on other grounds I am inclined to question the accuracy of his account in certain respects. It is true that the *Akhdām* are itinerant players and in Aden their women were said to lend themselves to prostitution. In certain districts of the Yemen however I have heard that the *Akhdām* like the *laḥjīs* act as cultivators, and al-Shahārī does not mention their employment in Aden as sweepers, or yet, only since 1962, it is averred,

[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

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to cleanse some of the streets in Ṣanᶜāᵓ—on the edge of which huts of the bidonville type are pointed out as their dwellings. To judge by the Aden Records in the Delhi Archives for 1906 [9] entitled "Endeavour made to break up the monopoly of the Jabartīs employed as sweepers by the employment of Arab Khādims," they did not work in this capacity there before that date. The Jabartīs are immigrants from the African side of the Red Sea, but of course the famous Jabartī family of *ᶜulamāᵓ* of medieval and later times is considered Mashāyikh and follows the Shāfiᶜī rite. Wādī Riṣyān between Zabīd and Taᶜizz is reported to be inhabited by Jabartīs with a curious dialect. Sweeping renders those engaging in it unclean in the eyes of the southern Arabian and puts the sweeper almost in an untouchable caste. Because of the nature of their employment the *Akhdām* sweepers do not eat with the rest of the Muslim community in Aden, but they pray together with them in the mosque; it would be interesting to know if the egalitarian ideas that are being pressed in Aden by the ruling clique extend to those sweepers still functioning there.

The dark coloured Ḥijrīs of Wādī Ḥajr who live on the confines of Ḥaḍramaut are also cultivators; they are also called Ṣubyān and I have suggested they might be related to the Sab of the African side of the Red Sea. For more detailed discussion of these non-Arab peoples I would refer to my "South Arabian and Ethiopic-African elements in the South Arabian population." [10]

A strange and interesting term for persons of half Ethiopian half Arab birth in use today in the Yemen is the word *killīs*, for which I can as yet offer no explanation.

In the Wādī Jīzān I came across the Makhāḍirah for the first time in my experience in 1971. These are migrant harvesters (*yittabiᶜūn al-khiḍār*) from the Yemen south of Jīzān whose labour is necessary to work on the harvest, which they do for a return in kind, i.e. Sorghum-millet-cane (*qaṣab*) and *dhurah* heads. The *qaṣab* is of course to feed their camels and donkeys. The people of Wādī Jīzān accept them as part of the local scene. Martha Mundy has since studied them in Wādī Mawr in detail. In the mediaeval Rasūlid fiscal survey *Mulakhkhaṣ al-fitan* (1411-12 A.D.) there is what looks like a reference to them, though not under the name Makhāḍirah. Those I have seen look to me like Arabs, and I imagine some would fall within

[9] Extl., July, p. 148-154, 171.

[10] *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Haile Selassie I University*, Addis Ababa, 1966, p. 25, 34.

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the *ḍaᶜīf* category, but others appear to be tribal. More recently they have been reported to me as frequenting the Zabīd and other southerly Tihāmah districts.

Slaves have been imported into South Arabia from very remote times. In parts of southern Arabia they constituted the standing armies of the petty sulṭāns, but they were also employed in some districts as cultivators and household servants. Though regarded as *milk*, that is to say "chattels", the slave soldiers had their own headman in Ḥaḍramaut and the Sulṭāns dealt with them through their headmen. In Ḥaḍramaut the slave soldiers in times past, on account of the dependence of the Sulṭāns upon them, were actually more fortunately placed than many of the other classes I have described.

The Jews of South Arabia formed a distinct group of their own since of course they differed in religion from the other classes, but they fitted into the social pattern as *raᶜīyah*, and seem to have been properly protected by all accounts. If they were converted to Islam they joined the social class appropriate to them in the Arab community, but converts after many generations are distinguished as Muslimānī not Muslim. Not quite all have left for Israel for there are still Jewish groups in the Ṣaᶜdah region of northern Yemen and at al-Raidah there are still two or three Jews to be seen, there is at least one community in Ḥugarīyah and on my longer journeys in 1964 and 1966 many a village where they had formerly lived was pointed out to me. In the Wāḥidī tribal area of Aden Federation the people of one village even complained that the Jewish community which had, as they said, been brought up with them, had been taken away. The Jews were mainly artisans, but in Khawlān I learned that they had even employed Arab cultivators to work their land on a share-cropping basis. This strikes me as very interesting because it could explain who the persons known in Arabic as *biṭānah* or associates of the Jewish tribes in Medina were—perhaps Arab cultivators working on their land. In some places of the Yemen I have seen Hebrew graffiti of quite recent origin, but the departure of most communities has made it difficult to study their role in traditional South Arabian society. Adult Jewish males of course paid the small tax known as *jizyah* as in other traditional Islamic states.

Apart from Europeans the only other foreign community of any importance was the Bāniyāns or Indian traders settled in the coastal cities, Ṣanᶜāᵓ and other places in the interior from at least mediaeval times.

I must now turn from the classes under tribal protection to the

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groups of superior social standing to the tribesmen. It would be not quite correct to consider the sulṭāns or chiefs or headmen, known as *shaikh, muqaddam, ᶜāqil* or *ḥādhiq*, as superior to the tribesmen for they are basically of the same stock, and whereas it is next to impossible to ascend from one of the classes I have mentioned to a higher class, chiefly families can rise and fall. I found in the Yemen in 1966 that the royalists had agreed to depose the leading *shaikh* of the great confederation of Bakīl who had supported the Republic, and substitute in his place a celebrated Khawlānī shaikh who had consistently combatted Egyptian invaders and their allies in the Republic. Sulṭāns however sometimes have a certain reverence paid them—I have seen their hands and knees kissed in ᶜAwdhalī country, but whether by tribesmen or *raᶜīyah*, I cannot remember.

Certain groups are recognised even by the tribes as superior to themselves—namely the Mashāyikh, the Saiyids, and the Sharīfs. The Mashāyikh one encounters in the Aden dependencies mainly, but they are to be found in the Shāfiᶜī districts of the Lower Yemen. The great Mashāyikh families there in mediaeval times, many of which probably still flourish today, are described in al-Sharjī's *Ṭabaqāt*.[11] For want of a better term I usually describe them as 'holy families,' that is to say they are distinguished by a certain hereditary virtue inherent in each member of any given holy family. Some Mashāyikh families specialise in healing, others in divination for water, others in saving distressed mariners at sea and so on. Almost invariably the Mashāyikh are the descendants of a saint interred under a domed tomb, a *qubbah*, which is maintained by a branch of the family itself. The Mashāyikh appear to represent the ancient system that existed, in South Arabia at least, of an hereditary priesthood which was at the same time a repository of customary law. Some Mashāyikh families such as the Bā ᶜAbbād, associated with the pre-Islamic and still existing shrine of the Prophet of God Hūd in Ḥaḍramaut, may well remount to the pre-Islamic age, but others are of more recent origin. There is in my mind no doubt that the Prophet Muḥammad himself was drawn from such a family —for Ibn Ḥazm the genealogist characterises his ancestor Hāshim as father of that branch of Quṣaiy in which was *al-bait*, the house, this meaning *al-sharaf*, or honour. He, Muḥammad, belonged then to the 'holy house' of Quraish of Mecca.

Somewhat similar to the Mashāyikh is the class found in the Zaidī

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[11] Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, Cairo, 1903, *passim*.

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part of the Yemen, known as Qāḍī (pl. Quḍāt), a list of families of which is to be found in Zabārah's *al-Anbāʾ*.[12] In dress there is no distinction between them and the Saiyids, and, as with the Saiyids, they only marry their daughters to their like. They too form part of the traditional administrative class of the Yemen, and indeed the very name Qāḍī implies the function of judging. It may be a designation applied very early in Islam to these families, and it would not surprise me to find it was used of such families even before Islam. It has been suggested to me that possibly the *qāḍīs*, notably those of the Abū ʿUqbah family, mentioned by Ibn Samurah,[13] might be *qāḍīs* by hereditary class, not merely by profession, but this is still speculative. Some of the Qāḍī families are certainly known to be ancient and of aristocratic descent, but they have, until now been too little studied. Though respected, the Qāḍīs, so far as I am aware, have none of that aura of the "holy family" which attaches to the Mashāyikh, and indeed there would be no place for this in Zaidism where the Prophet's house alone is held in special veneration. This view of mine is strengthened by the following circumstance. The tribal villages round Dhamār are considered Abwāb li-Dhamār, Gates to Dhamār, because *al-dāʿī li-Dhamār*, the summons to protect/honour the undertaking (made to the villagers) is to Dhamār (which is *muhajjarah*, a protected *hijrah* enclave), and the tribes would respond to the protection of the Saiyids there, such as the Ḥamīd al-Dīn, Sharaf al-Dīn and ʿIzz al-Dīn, but not the Quḍāt since they are not *muhajjarīn*, *i.e.*, do not come within the tribal protection. Apparently however some Qāḍīs assert that they too, like the Saiyids, do come under such tribal protection.

The Saiyids and Sharīfs are the descendants of Muḥammad through his two grandsons Ḥusain and Ḥasan, and form the religious aristocracy of Islam in nearly every Muslim country, excepting a few where sects like the Ibāḍīs are in power. Let it be said here that whereas the Shīʿah at a later period emphasize the relationship of ʿAlī to the Prophet through the latter's daughter Fāṭimah as his main qualification to succeed to the leadership of the Muslim community, the more important qualification in the eyes of ʿAlī's opponent Muʿāwiyah was his kinship to the Prophet as his cousin. In the Yemen the Saiyids formed a great part of the intellectual élite and much of the official governing class, and there are still many among Republican officials. In Ḥaḍramaut

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[12] *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

[13] *Ṭabaqāt fuqahāʾ al-Yaman*, Cairo, 1957, p. 234.

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they are very influential, though in the tribal districts there and in the former Aden Federation their numbers are small. In the Yemen the great Saiyid houses belong to the Zaidī school of moderate Shīᶜah and are said to number between 200,000 to 300,000, whereas in Ḥaḍramaut they are orthodox Shāfiᶜīs; but there are also Shāfiᶜī Saiyids in the Shāfiᶜī districts of the Yemen who are held in great respect (*iḥtirām*). In effect this makes no difference to the position they hold in South Arabia as a religious aristocracy of a theocratic type, though in Ḥaḍramaut they have never attained the temporal power that the Zaidī Saiyids enjoyed in the Yemen. It is interesting that while the Zaidī Saiyids bear arms, and their Imām is always a military figure —following the Zaidī principle of commending what is right, and prohibiting what is evil, the Ḥaḍramī Saiyids have given up the bearing of arms and rely on their spiritual prestige to maintain their position in society, though a few Saiyid tribes there still carry arms as they undoubtedly did at the time of their arrival in the country about a thousand years ago. Some Mashāyikh also have given up arms, and the motive in both cases may be a compound of Ṣūfistic ideas and social pressures. With their superior claim to religious virtue through their ancestor the Saiyids in Ḥaḍramaut have, in many places, arrogated to themselves the functions of the Mashāyikh, and frequently though not invariably there exists a bitter rivalry between the two types of holy house. [14]

Both the Saiyids and Mashāyikh are treated with some reverence by tribesfolk. Their hands or knees are kissed, and they are of course accorded the place of honour in reception rooms. Nevertheless it is for the tribesman a love-hate relationship for he dislikes being in their power. A proverb runs—a kiss on the hand means hatred of it (*shammah ᶜalā kaff bughḍ-hā*). Among the Saiyid and Sharīf class the rule that one's daughter may not marry a man of a class socially inferior to her own is particularly strictly observed, and it has even become a legal question in Shāfiᶜī books as to whether a Sharīfah should be allowed to marry someone not her equal in a case when no man of equal status is available, or whether she should live and die a spinster.

In theory the Zaidī school lays some stress on equality in virtue and religion as determining whether a marriage can be allowed, rather than social equality, and there do seem to be cases where daughters of Saiyids marry outside their class, but generally Zaidī Saiyids and

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[14] See my *Saiyids of Ḥaḍramaut*, London, 1957, *passim*.

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Qāḍīs marry their daughters to their social equals. A Saiyid is free (*murakhkhaṣ*) to marry whomsoever he likes from any group, but he would never, for example, marry a *laḥjīyah* woman. In Mabyan I was told that if a Saiyid should marry a tribeswoman, and his son by her in his turn marries a tribeswoman, then the issue of the latter marriage has the *intisāb* to the tribal group—by this I understand that he is considered a tribesman and takes the tribal name. On the other hand if a Saiyid's son by a tribal (*qabīlī*) woman marries a Sharīfah his *intisāb* remains to the Saiyid house.

Such then are the components which go to form the structure of South Arabian society—let me now attempt to describe the workings of this society, and its inter-relations.

It is essential in the first place to recognise that whatever form of government has existed in Southern Arabia the real power lies with the large arms-bearing tribes, virtually impregnable in their mountain fastnesses and able to control the cities and agricultural plains or plateaux. Invaders such as the Aiyūbids, the Mamelukes, the Ottoman Turks, and, from 1962-67, the Egyptians, have been able to seize and for a time to control the plains, but their efforts to conquer the mountain districts have always failed. So the tribes have continued overlords of the cultivators, the black population of the Tihāmah, and the coastal fishing communities, either in their own right, or as tribal troops of the rulers. Aden for example seems at one period to have been ruled by the warlike tribes we nowadays call the ᶜAulaqīs (the earliest reference to the ᶜAwāliqah known to me is 1129 A.D.),[15] and at others by Yāfiᶜ which in former times exported its fighting men to India and East Africa—this tribe of course remounts to pre-Islamic times. The capture of Aden by the British in 1839 freed the port from the tribal overlordship which may have ruined its prosperity.

The tribesman has scant respect for the townsman whom he contemptuously calls a *sūqī*—which one might a little freely translate as "market-rat," and he dislikes the coarse, often obscene speech of the markets, for the tribesman is chaste in his language. When powerful enough to do so he will squeeze what he can out of the townsman, the peasant, and the fisherman. In former times the Ḥaḍramī tribes exercised a variety of forms of exaction—there was the tax for protecting palms, nominally 5% but much more was taken, there were

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[15] In Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusain, *Ghāyat al-amānī*, edited (very badly), by Saᶜīd ᶜĀshūr and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah, Cairo, 1968, p. 293.

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taxes on the fisherman's catch, forced gifts from the more affluent classes at various times of the year, and the like. Tribes all over South Arabia took escort fees called *siyārah*, the ancient Arabic *khafārah*, and they levied fees for protecting markets or for permission to occupy a place in a market. The Caliph ʿUthmān is said to have introduced market taxes to the Prophet's market in Medina.[16] These taxes were levied sometimes by individual tribesmen, sometimes by their headmen or Sulṭāns. Very profitable to the tribes of course were the ports such as Aden, Shiḥr, Ẓufār, where they could levy tribute on the India trade. When a strong centralised government seized these ports or the cities of the interior it would take over these tolls and dues, but within the country itself under a centralised government imposed on the tribes they still continued to take many taxes of various kinds which were customary when they were independent of any government.

On the other hand in return the tribes recognise certain obligations to the communities subject to them—notably that of protection against other tribes as I have already described. Not to do so, besides being damaging to a tribesman's honour would also affect his source of revenue for if his protection were infringed with impunity other tribes would attack him and wrest more from him. So at the slightest injury done him, if only by accident, the tribesman is immediately ready to have recourse to force of arms. If unchecked this situation would eventuate in anarchy, and very often periods of tribal anarchy do supervene. But, over thousands of years of tribalism, institutions have been evolved to regulate and control even tribesmen whose chiefs will recognise no other chief as entitled to exercise any influence over them whatsoever. It seems to me almost a characteristic of the society to turn to a third party to mediate in even quite trifling transactions, and so the tribes will resort-on the one hand to the religious aristocracy, or to the non-arms bearing group inferior to them. To communicate with one another they will use the *muzaiyin* or the *dallāl* or broker who entertains them when they are in town and buys and sells for them on commission. He understands their ways and their laws and will even act as a mediator between them. I shall turn shortly to the role of the religious aristocracy in relation to the tribes which I propose to discuss in some detail, but I should first say something about the *raʿīyah* or subject classes.

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[16] Cf. M. J. Kister, "The market of the Prophet", *Journal of Economic, Social and Political History of the Orient*, Leiden, 1965, viii, 272-6, and "Mecca and Tamim" *ibid*, p. 113-63.

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In Ḥaḍramaut the larger cities were divided into a number of quarters which had developed in an organic way, each with its own elaborate organisation for regulating itself and protecting its interests as far as possible against the encroachments of other groups. In my recent studies of Ṣanᶜāᵓ quarters however and from data collected in Zabīd, Yarīm and Radāᶜ there is a much more homogeneous organisation, showing the influence of centuries of strong government control so that the role of the local *ᶜāqil* or headman of the Ṣanᶜāᵓ quarter is reduced to settling petty disputes, maintaining roads and drainage, and the like.

In Tarīm of Ḥaḍramaut, where the quarter organisation manifests itself in its greatest elaboration, the quarters are managed by headmen (*raᵓīs*) drawn from the *miskīn* class, namely artisans, brokers, shopkeepers, and, with less say in affairs, the *ḍaᶜīfs* or workers in clay. They are responsible for a range of services to the community, from rendering aid in case of fires and accidents to serving at weddings and assisting at funerals. They have also certain privileges recognised by the other social groups in the city, Saiyids, tribesmen and others. Furthermore the craft organisations—you can hardly call them guilds—were able to enforce certain rules agreed upon among themselves. For instance one cannot dismiss a carpenter from one's quarter and employ another, or employ a carpenter from a different quarter. Some craft organisations too have their fixed charges, and some occupations certain restrictive practices like a modern trades-union. The quarters are notorious for their quarrels with each other, especially over boundaries, and like the tribes they generally have to resort to a third party to settle their disputes; the mediator will often be a Saiyid. Though the merchant class of the towns which often includes Saiyid merchants was squeezed by the Sulṭāns as far as they could do so, their exactions were tempered by the fear that merchants might find conditions too difficult and move elsewhere, as a rich member of a Saiyid family the Āl Bin Sahl threatened to do over a century ago. The wealth of the Āl Bin Sahl was derived from Singapore. The agricultural labourer class is in theory free, but all too often the cultivator is bound by a share-cropping contract to a man of wealth and he becomes in practice more like a serf; his only means of escape from accumulated debt may be to run away. If ill-treated by a Muslim, members of Jewish communities, which formed part of Yemeni society, had their recognised ways and means of hitting back at an aggressor. In the Yemen they could appeal to the Imām who would certainly have looked into their

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case. Al-Hādī ila ʾl-Ḥaqq, about the 3rd century A.H., was particularly scrupulous in protecting Jewish and Christian communities in northern Yemen.

All these classes, groups and communities were, in the past, mainly governed by their own customary law—*i.e.*, with little reference to the *sharīᶜah*. Basically, *sharīᶜah* is the law of the Prophet and his House, the Saiyids and Ashrāf, and they attempt to introduce it everywhere. Yet the tribes and other social groups, whose custom is sometimes at variance with *sharīᶜah*, do not always willingly accept the latter. The customary law relating to sexual conduct among the black Ṣubyān of the south coast and probably of the black people of the Yemen Tihāmah for instance, is of a laxness from an Islamic point of view that the *sharīᶜah* could never permit. In the Yemen there are districts in which despite the strict insistence on *sharīᶜah* law by the Zaidī Imāms, the tribes, even now, still follow their own customary law. Fisher law is naturally a highly technical affair only understood by fisher headmen who carry the principles and practices of it in their heads. Then again the customary laws, (known in Ṣaᶜdah for instance as *sharᶜ*), applying to irrigation and agricultural matters-which affect the bulk of the inhabitants of Southern Arabia directly-have their technicalities and local experts within the community itself. As a rule therefore these groups each settle their disputes among themselves, but when they are unable to do so they often resort to arbitration from outsiders, though this would, I imagine, be commoner in cases which are not of a technical nature. The situation is well illustrated in the agreement made on the 3rd of Rajab, 1290 H./27th August, 1873, between the Naqīb of al-Mukallā and the Quᶜaiṭīs, for the purchase, by the latter, of half of al-Mukallā. It is stipulated that the Naqīb ᶜUmar is (to remain) Governor of al-Mukallā and to do justice according to Muḥammadan law (so in the English version). "If any quarrel should arise among the sea-faring men, they are to be sent to those of their own class. In all cases relating to law, justice to be done according to the Muhammadan law. All mercantile classes to be sent to the merchants for trial. Khairullah, the slave of the late Naqib Salah, is to do all the work relating to the Bazaar." [17]

In short the fishermen and possibly dhow crews deal with their own cases, the merchants with theirs, and a slave is appointed to deal with breaches of the peace in the market. At the present day, even when a

[17] Quoted from Ismail Hakki Tevfik, *Güney Arabistan meselesi*, I. *Hadramut*, Filibe, 1935, p. 42.

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centralised state is the form of government of a territory, administrative officials will follow such methods and employ traditional arbiters to settle cases.

The traditional arbiters are the Sulṭāns or headmen, the Saiyids and Sharīfs, and the Mashāyikh. Both of the types of religious aristocracy are themselves organised in families and even tribes, and they settle their own disputes among themselves. At one period there was in Ḥaḍramaut a *naqīb* of the Saiyids, the office being hereditary in the ᶜAidarūs family who probably acted as arbiter between the Saiyid families.

Southern Arabia seems to alternate between periods of centralisation and reversion to tribal anarchy, that is to say when each tribal confederation acts as an independent unit and is normally at war with its neighbour or in a temporary state of truce. Centralisation seems to me to be of two categories, secular and theocratic. Secular centralisation when not imposed by a foreign power, would be in the charge of tribal groups whose chief has somehow managed to render himself more powerful than his fellows—this is very difficult to achieve. Historically it may result from superior military power arising from new weapons, organisation, or external support, I am persuaded from my researches that the theocratic state is the type of centralisation most natural to South Arabia, but I make no claim that it is the inevitable form for the future. Conditions are changing but it seems to me the logical form of centralised government for at least some of the territories of the south.

I have said that the true source of political power lies with the tribal shaikhs who will accept no control by their peers. The solution to this impasse was worked out even prior to Islam by the evolution of the organisation centred upon the sacred enclave, the *ḥaram*, managed by an hereditary religious aristocracy, respected and protected by the tribes. As the holy family controlling the sacred enclave derives its authority from a divine or supernatural source the tribes can accept its authority in certain matters without loss of honour. I have already developed this theme in a contribution to the *Mélanges Taha Ḥusain*, [18] but must briefly recapitulate the argument. The sacred enclave is a piece of territory governed by God through the agency of the "holy family" which maintains the temple, mosque or tomb it invariably

[18] "Haram and Hawtah: the sacred enclave in Arabia", *Mélanges Taha Ḥusain*, edit. ᶜAbd al-Rahmān Badawī, Cairo, 1962, p. 41-58.

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contains. The surrounding tribes are bound by treaty to protect and preserve it, and to contribute to the expenses of maintaining it. The Lord of the enclave, a Saiyid or one of the Mashāyikh acts as arbiter between these tribes in their perpetual quarrels. A man of personality, Lord of a sacred enclave, can become very powerful through manipulating the tribes, an art he learns by observation in the assemblies. If the holy family expands cadets migrate to other centres and often set up new sacred enclaves. Law and religion are of course the stock-in-trade of these holy families. I have been drawing my picture from the data I collected in modern South Arabia, but as one examines the early history of Islam it is abundantly evident that the rise of Muḥammad follows just this political pattern—I do not take account here of his prophetic gifts.

In the work known as *Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwah* [19] you may find, with a wealth of circumstantial detail which does not figure in the standard biographies, how Muḥammad went from tribe to tribe seeking protection. The fragmentary details of documents preserved in his biography show that protection was what the Prophet was accorded at Medina. Now, in present-day Yemen, the action of a Saiyid in taking protection of a tribe to which he thereby brings *barakah* or blessing, is known as *hijrah*, and a *hijrah* seems also to mean a common and secure centre where various tribes of a confederation may meet. (We may have to modify our understanding of what the Islamic term *hijrah* means—for it may not mean 'the flight' of the Prophet to Medina as it has so far been rendered). The Zaidī dynasty of the Yemen commenced with the first ancestor who took refuge in Ṣaʿdah in the north and acted as arbiter in tribal quarrels.

Theocratic rule has certain weaknesses in that the ruler or Imām is dependent upon the good will of his tribes to fight on his behalf. He must manipulate them in such a way that they do not unite against him but undertake to combat his enemies. An Imām of personality and political genius like the late Imām Aḥmad may succeed as he did in 1948 in getting the tribes to fight for him even without pay. From 1918 to 1962 the Yemen was fortunate in its Imāms in one respect, if not in others, that they were able to manipulate the tribes to unify the country and establish security, but the necessary actions they took to maintain centralised power by breaking the power of important

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[19] Aḥmad b. ʿAbdullāh al-Iṣbahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*, Ḥaidarābād, 1950, p. 236 f.

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tribal shaikhs and Saiyid houses potential rivals of their own, aroused opposition among those groups. The necessity too, of finding means to support their tribal followers by the only way possible—namely taxing the wealthier South—also caused dissatisfaction.

I think that ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib must somehow have been accepted into the Yemen in this way by Hamdān—the tribe that has supported the first Zaidī Imāms and generations of their descendants—for it would be absurd to think he conquered Yemen by force of arms. As a member of the Meccan holy house he would be acceptable as arbiter to the Yemenite tribes many of whom later fought for him at Ṣiffīn. It is notable however that, when a group of aggrieved tribesmen from Egypt killed ᶜUthmān at Medina, neither he nor ᶜAlī had troops at their disposal. It seems to me that the early history of Islam is largely to be understood as the manipulation of tribes by a holy house—I mean ᶜAbd Manāf—to which the Umaiyads also belonged.

To come back however to South Arabian society, I think I detect a sort of natural belance in this society, left to itself, and the very tribes who would oppress the other elements of society cannot go beyond certain limits. The peasant or labourer when unjustly treated will go to a Saiyid or one of the Mashāyikh who will intercede for him "by the right of my ancestor" as he says, that is the Prophet. A man or a tribe can even go to another and sacrifice an animal at his door—known as *ᶜaqīrah*—to beseech him to obtain restitution for a wrong done to the former. An interesting case of the use of the *ᶜaqīrah* as a form of entreaty was during the 1962-67 war employed by Ṣallāl or Ruᶜainī, I forget which, who sent these sacrifices to certain large Zaidī tribes which had supported the Republic to ask for support against the Imām's forces. These tribes, having lost many men in fighting the Imām, collected the cost of the animals and returned it, refusing to fight further. The influence of holy families or Lords of sacred enclaves diminishes also if they are known merely to 'eat' the revenues of a shrine, or to be of unseemly way of life.

The description of South Arabian society that I have attempted, imperfect as it is and must be, relates to the situation up to the years 1967-68, and this structure still underlies society and government there—especially in the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen), where the disappearance of an Imām, be it permanent or temporary, has made little alteration to the society as a whole. In South Yemen the situation is different. When the British withdrew from the former Aden Protectorates after deliberately making the way for the numerically small

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but well organised Marxist body of about 500 party members to take over power, British officials may have thought that the tribal army they had formed would act as a moderating influence and perhaps gain the ascendancy. This in fact the army very nearly did, but it lost to the superior skill of the Marxist minority in political manoeuvre. Since that time the Aden Marxists, many not born in South Yemen, have deliberately set out to destroy the ancient order and form a society on the most extreme communist lines. To achieve this the most ruthless actions have been taken, including murder, violence and torture. Reports reaching the outside world from Aden, which has not been entirely successful in imposing an iron curtain round the country, indicate that the Marxists are greatly resented, and, where possible, resisted; but the most recent information available to me seems to point to the subjection of much of the country to the Marxist rulers. The refugees, of whom there are many thousands scattered over the Arab states, describe with shocked horror both the tyrannical nature of the régime and the brutalities with which it is maintained. It is difficult to assess how far the Marxists have succeeded in their aims of changing the social structure of the country, though reports indicate that their doctrinaire approach to agricultural land tenure and nationalisation of land seems to have resulted in a notable lowering of agricultural production. On the social side, the tribal army has been replaced by an army drawing on a different section of the population—peasants (*Ḥijrīs*), slaves, fishermen, and other classes regarded as being of inferior status by the tribal and learned classes of Southern Arabia. The new army is given daily doses of Marxist indoctrination as, or so it is reported, are government officials and others. The Aden Marxists make it their policy to attempt the destruction of the Islamic faith in Southern Arabia, and, while they may conceivably have gained ground amongst the young, they have been courageously resisted by some of the *ʿulamāʾ* and others who are reported to have lost their lives in consequence. These actions would be consistent with the polices laid down in the so-called National Charter of 1965.

For more detailed information on the rise of the Aden Marxists my article, "The two Yemens: historical perspectives and present attitudes" [20] serve as an introduction, but however much one deplores what has happened and is happening in South Yemen which was developing prosperously along liberal lines until the mid-sixties, the

[20] *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, London, 1973, p. 3-16.

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attempt to put Marxist doctrine into practice in an Arab country is undeniably interesting to study, miserable as its consequences are for the great majority of the people of South Yemen.

Note: One group which has not been discussed in this chapter is the Ismāʿīlī and Bohrah sects, of the importance of which I am becoming increasingly aware with closer contact with the Yemen, *i.e.*, the Yemen Arab Republic of the north. They have however been too little studied up till the present to treat of them here though the interest of scholars in these sects is now aroused and opportunities for field research in Ismāʿīlī districts do now exist.

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